

Why are Marines Disembarking in Costa Rica?

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The recent decision in Costa Rica to allow a massive build-up of US military presence has less to do with drug trafficking than US imperial strategy.

With votes secured from the official National Liberation Party (PLN), the Libertarian Movement, and Justo Orozco, the evangelical congressman from the Costa Rican Renovation party, on July 1st, the Costa Rican Congress authorized the entry into that country of 46 warships from the U.S. Navy, 200 helicopters and combat aircraft and 7,000 Marines.

While the various published stories do not allow a clear view of the decision's origins, the limited evidence available seems to indicate that it was Washington who asked for the presence of the troops. The extremely telling silence of the U.S. press on the subject and the absence of any kind of explicit reference to this authorization in the daily press bulletins of the State and Defense Departments feeds the suspicion that it was the White House that took the initiative that was favorably received by the Costa Rican Congress, and demanded the greatest discretion.

What was communicated to the Central American country was that the ruling situation in Mexico had forced the drug cartels to modify their traditional routes for approaching and entering the United States and that the deployment of a strong military force on the Central American isthmus was necessary to thwart this; a sine qua non condition for waging an effective battle against drug trafficking. As might have been expected, the government of President Laura Chinchilla – tightly linked over the years with USAID, no less – lent her entire support and that of her congressmen in obedient response to Washington's request.

Nobody should be surprised when Washington resorts to the drug trafficking pretext, since it's what Washington commonly uses when others are lacking, such as an earthquake in oh, say, Haiti – to justify the intrusion of U.S. military personnel in the countries of Our America.

Nevertheless, what works against the credibility of this argument is the fact that the countries where there is a strong U.S. military presence are precisely those that stand out for their increased production and commercialization of drugs. As shown in "The Dark Side of Empire. The Violation of Human Rights by the United States," the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime – an unimpeachable source – has proven with abundant statistics that since U.S. troops were installed in Afghanistan, huge advances have been made in the production and exportation of opium as well as the fabrication of heroin, while in Colombia, the U.S. presence has not prevented (quite to the contrary) the registration of a notable expansion in the area destined to the cultivation of coca.

All this should not cause any surprise whatsoever, for a variety of reasons. One of them is that the country that assumes the right to fight drug trafficking worldwide shows an incapacity as amazing as it is suspicious to do the same within its borders, from dismantling the networks that link narco-mafias with authorities, police and local and federal judges who facilitate the drug business, to

implementing a minimally meaningful campaign to contain addiction and treat addicts. [1]

It's not that surprising, actually, since drug trafficking moves at least \$400 billion dollars annually, that are later conveniently "laundered" in the numerous tax havens that the main capitalist countries (starting with the United States and Europe) have established far and wide throughout the globe in order to be re-introduced later on into the official banking system and in this way, strengthen the business of financial capital.

For another thing, the weakness and inconsistency of this pretext – that of the "fight against drug trafficking," becomes even more obvious when it is learned that the United States is the number one worldwide producer of marijuana, something that according to a study from the Drug Science Foundation, reaches a sum of more than \$35 billion dollars in that country, a figure that surpasses the combined value of wheat and corn production. [2]

Third, and finally, control and administration of the drug trafficking business as a means to sustain imperialist domination in the Empire's provincial reaches cannot be underestimated. Wasn't it Great Britain who re-introduced opium in China (a drug that had been prohibited by the Emperor Yongzheng due to the damage it had caused his people) the massive consumption of which allowed the British to balance their trade deficits with China? In order to push this addiction among the Chinese the British and the Portuguese waged two wars; one from 1839 to 1842, and another from 1856 to 1860, the result of which were the establishment of two beachheads for the organization of opium trafficking throughout China: one in Hong Kong, under British control, and the other in Macao, dominated by the Portuguese.

Why should we think that the United States, the putative offspring of the British Empire, would be motivated by any different interests when it pays lip service to the war on drugs? Isn't it perhaps useful to U.S. interests to have a Latin America characterized by a proliferation of "failed states," – eaten away by the corruption generated by drug trafficking and the consequences that ensue: social disintegration, mafias, paramilitaries, etc. – that for this very reason are incapable of offering the least resistance to imperial designs?

The permission granted by the Costa Rican Congress lasts for six months, starting on July 1st of this year. Nevertheless, this concession, that came about in the context of the Mérida Initiative (which includes Mexico and Central America) is a project that has goals but no deadlines, for which reason the probability is practically zero that the U.S. troops will leave Costa Rica at the end of this year and return to their home bases.

Furthermore, international experience shows that in Europe as well as Japan, the U.S. troops stationed there after the Second World War for just a few years, later extended through the pretext of the Cold War, managed to prolong their stay in those locations for 65 years without their chief officers showing the least sign of boredom or desire to return home.

In Okinawa, the widespread rejection of the local population against the Yankee occupants – who, sheltered by immunity were murdering, raping and robbing to their hearts content – was insufficient to force the dismantling of the U.S. base there. Incidentally, this highlights the courage and effectiveness of President Rafael Correa's government that did manage to achieve the ouster of U.S. troops from the Manta airbase. And in case a popular outcry should arise over just this one occurrence in Costa Rica, a few criminal operations of the type that the CIA knows very well how to carry out should be enough for an instant reversal, above all with a government such as that of Laura Chinchilla, eager to prove its unconditional submission to imperial dictates.

Just like the establishment of the Obama-Uribe treaty whereby Colombia initially ceded the use of

seven military bases to the United States, in this case, the U.S. military personnel will enjoy complete immunity from Costa Rican justice, and its members will be able to enter and leave Costa Rica entirely at will, and move through the entire country dressed in their uniforms, carrying their combat gear and weapons. With this decision Costa Rican sovereignty is not only humiliated but reaches ridiculous limits for a country that in 1948 abolished its armed forces and, thanks in large measure to this, was able to develop an advanced social policy in the depressing context of the Central American region, precisely because the oligarch's gendarme had been disarmed.

As far as arms go, the congressional authorization allows the entry of Coast Guard and smaller vessels, but also others such as the latest generation of aircraft carriers like *Makin Island*, launched in August of 2006 and with the capacity to house 102 officers and 1,449 Marines, transport 42 CH-46 helicopters, five AV-8B Harrier aircraft and six Blackhawk helicopters. Apart from this, the legislation that passed extends permission for ships such as *USS Freedom*, launched in 2008, with anti-submarine capacity and the ability to move in shallow waters. The permission also extends to other boats, like catamarans, a hospital ship and various vehicles known for their amphibian capacity to move on land as well as sea. Weapons and gear that basically, have little or nothing to do with drug trafficking, even in the unlikely case that this were the real desire of the Marines. It's quite obvious that they have another objective.

This U.S. government initiative must be situated in the context of the growing militarization U.S. foreign policy, whose most important expressions in the Latin American framework have been, until now, the reactivation of the Fourth Fleet, the signing of the Obama-Uribe treaty, the de facto military occupation of Haiti, the construction of a wall of shame between Mexico and the United States, the coup d'état in Honduras and the later legitimization of the electoral fraud that elevated Porfirio Lobo to the presidency, the concession of new military bases by the reactionary government of Panama, to which is now added the disembarkation of Marines in Costa Rica. Of course, all these moves are articulated within the maintenance of the blockade and hounding of the Cuban Revolution, and the ongoing harassment of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. On an international level, the disembarkation of U.S. Marines in Costa Rica should be interpreted within the framework of an imminent war against Iran and the grotesque provocation against North Korea, the serious consequences of which have been warned about for some time by Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz in his *Reflections*.

Therefore, the Empire is advancing in its militarization of the region and in preparation for a military adventure of global proportions. If the aggression against Iran finally comes to pass, as predicted in recent days, the extremely serious international situation that will result will push the United States to try to guarantee, at all costs, seamless and absolute control over what its geopolitical strategists call the Great American Island, an enormous continent that extends from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, as separated from the Eurasian landmass as it is from Africa and which, according to them, plays a fundamental role in U.S. national security.

That is the fundamental reason for the preventive exorbitant militarization of U.S. foreign policy. It's ridiculous to try to convince our people that the twenty-odd military bases established in Central and South America and the Caribbean, to which we now add the disembarkation in Costa Rica and the activation of the Fourth Fleet, has drug trafficking as its objective. As experience teaches us, drug trafficking cannot be fought with military strategy but with social policy. And the United States does not apply it within its borders nor permit it to be applied outside, thanks to the enormous influence that the IMF and World Bank have over vulnerable and indebted countries.

The experience in Colombia and now in Mexico (with more than 26,000 dead since President Felipe Calderón declared his "war on drug trafficking" in December, 2006!) is a testament to the fact that the solution to the problem does not rest with Marines, aircraft carriers, submarines and gunship

helicopters, but with the creation of a just and fair society, something that is incompatible with the logic of capitalism and repugnant to the fundamental interests of the Empire.

In summary: the disembarkation of the Marines in Costa Rica has as its objective the reinforcement of U.S. domination in the region, the toppling by a variety of methods of those governments considered to be “enemies” (Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador), weakening still more the vacillating and ambivalent “center-left” governments and reinforcing the rightwing that has made a resurgence along the Pacific Coast (Chile, Peru, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico). It is a rearrangement of the Empire’s “back yard” in order to have free hands and a secured rearguard while the arrogant Empire wages war in other latitudes.

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P.S.

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<http://alainet.org/active/39632>

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Footnotes

[1] Atilio A. Boron and Andrea Vlahusic, *The Dark Side of Empire; the Violation of Human Rights by the United States* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009), pg. 73.

[2] Ibid, *The Dark Side of Empire*, p. 72.